

Phony Officials Pretend to "Verify" Sweepstakes, Lotteries

We have repeatedly warned seniors about phony lotteries and sweepstakes, but the con artists who run these scams are persistent and persuasive. We still receive calls from consumers who are tempted to send money to claim prizes. A recent caller wanted us to verify that a sweepstakes was legitimate. She had been notified that she had won a sweepstakes and had been instructed to wire money to Costa Rica to pay for a so-called franchise tax. A person who claimed to be from the Florida Customs Office contacted her directly and assured her the sweepstakes was legitimate.

Please do not be duped, and do not allow your family members to be duped, by "verification" from callers who claim to be government officials. Whenever you are asked to pay any money, for any reason, in order to claim a prize, you are dealing with a crook. The requirement to wire money, rather than using US mail, is another tip-off. Do not accept "verification" from someone who calls you. Anyone can call you and say anything! Also do not attempt to verify a claim by calling a number given to you by the person or organization you are checking up on. They can just give you the number of an accomplice. If you call anyone, look up the number yourself in a public directory.

Finally, if you have been told that you have won a big prize in a sweepstakes or lottery you did not enter, especially a foreign lottery, and you are being asked to send money, you do not need to make any phone calls to check up on the offer. I can tell you right now: it is a scam. Call us at (800) 252-8011 if you have questions.

Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas